

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-06

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 SP-02 PM-03 INR-05

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PRS-01 H-01 /038 W

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R 200115Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6896

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MEXICO 10707

LIMDIS

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MX, US

SUBJECT: ECHEVERRIA'S CONCERN OVER CONGRESSIONAL LETTER
CRITICIZING MEXICO

REF: A) MEXICO 10428; B) MEXICO 10525

SUMMARY: PRESIDENT ECHEVERRIA THROUGH A CONFIDENTIAL EMISSARY
HAS EXPRESSED TO ME HIS CONCERN OVER THE LETTER FROM 76
CONGRESSMEN AS AN INDICATION THAT OUR RELATIONS ARE
DETERIORATING JUST AT THE MOMENT--TRANSITION BETWEEN
ADMINISTRATIONS--WHEN IT IS IN OUR MUTUAL INTEREST TO
STRENGTHEN THEM. WHILE THE PRESIDENT'S PUBLIC REACTION
HAS BEEN ONE OF INDIGNATION AND ASSERTIVENESS, HIS PRIVATE
ONE AS CONVEYED TO ME IS ONE OF ANXIETY THAT HIS GOVERNMENT
HAS GONE TOO FAR IN ITS ANTI-US RHETORIC AT HOME AND ABROAD.
(THIS IS A FAMILIAR TACTIC ON LEA'S PART.)
END SUMMARY.

1. AT HIS REQUEST, I RECEIVED SENATOR-ELECT FAUSTO ZAPATA LOREDO,
FORMER SUBSECRETARY OF THE PRESIDENCY AND ONE
OF SEVERAL PRESIDENTIAL CONFIDANTS. ZAPATA AS
FORMER GOM PRESS SPOKESMAN HAD BEEN USED FREQUENTLY
BY THE PRESIDENT AS A
CONTACT WITH THE US PRESS. IN REQUESTING THE APPOINTMENT
ZAPATA SAID HE WISHED TO CONVEY A PRIVATE MESSAGE FROM
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ECHEVERRIA.

2. THE PRESIDENT'S CONCERN WAS OVER THE LETTER SIGNED BY 76 U.S. CONGRESSMEN AS THE LATEST AND, IN MEXICO'S EYES, MOST SERIOUS INDICATION OF A PERCEIVED DETERIORATION IN US-MEXICAN RELATIONS. (ZAPATA SAW ME RECENTLY WITH ESSENTIALLY THE SAME MESSAGE BUT DID NOT PURPORT ON THAT OCCASION TO BE SPEAKING DIRECTLY FOR THE PRESIDENT.) ZAPATA SAID THE PRESIDENT WAS DEEPLY WORRIED THAT IN THESE LAST FOUR MONTHS OF HIS ADMINISTRATION BAD FEELINGS ON BOTH SIDES MIGHT BE HARDENED, THUS PRESENTING THE NEXT MEXICAN ADMINISTRATION WITH AN UNTENABLE AND PERHAPS IRREVERSIBLE POSITION. HE WISHED THIS TO BE AVOIDED: INDEED, HE WANTED PARTICULARLY AT THIS TIME TO STRENGTHEN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

3. IN ASSURING ZAPATA THAT WE TOO CERTAINLY WISHED TO AVOID A CONFRONTATIONAL ATMOSPHERE, I POINTED OUT THAT IN MY VIEW THE EXTREME MEXICAN REACTION TO THE LETTER HAD ONLY MADE MATTERS WORSE FROM THEIR VIEWPOINT, AMPLIFYING IT AND GIVING IT A RESONANCE WHICH IT OTHERWISE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD, PARTICULARLY WITHIN MEXICO. TOGETHER WITH THE MEXICAN REACTION TO THE BRACERO REPATRIATION FLIGHTS, WHICH BORDERED ON INVECTIVE, THE REACTION TO THE LETTER WAS DISCONCERTING TO THE EMBASSY. ZAPATA AGREED WITH THIS, EXPLAINING SOMEWHAT APOLOGETICALLY THAT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR ECHEVERRIA HIMSELF LET ALONE THE MEXICAN PRESS, POLITICAL WORLD AND PUBLIC TO UNDERSTAND THAT THE US WAS A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY IN WHICH A LETTER SUCH AS THIS WAS NOT NECESSARILY A MOVE CENTRALLY ORCHESTRATED BY THE WHITE HOUSE/STATE DEPT/CIA.

4. I CONTINUED THAT THE REACTION TO THE LETTER HAD THE EFFECT OF "A HEAVY RAIN ON ALREADY DAMP GROUND" WERE THE CLIMATE OF RELATIONS WHAT IT NORMALLY WAS A LETTER SUCH AS THIS WOULD NOT ATTRACT THE ATTENTION IT HAD, BUT WITH THE BACKGROUN OF THE ZIONISM VOTE, THE EXCELSIOR EVENTS, AND MEXICAN BEHAVIOR IN WORLD FORUMS, THERE WAS CURRENTLY A LESS HELPFUL ATTITUDE IN THE UNITED STATES MEDIA TOWARDS MEXICO.

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5. WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT THE LETTER COULD BE A SPONTANEOUS EXPRESSION OF CONCERN, ZAPATA SAID THE PRESIDENT THOUGHT THAT 76 CONGRESSMEN EXPRESSING SUCH VIEWS COULD NOT BE IGNORED AND WONDERED OUTLOUD WHO MIGHT BE ORGANIZING IT. ECHEVERRIA WAS SUSPICIOUS THAT MEXICAN OR TRANSNATIONAL INTERESTS MIGHT BE BEHIND ALL THIS.

6. I TOLD ZAPATA THAT SO FAR AS WE KNEW, REPRESENTATIVE

MACDONALD HAD CIRCULATED THE LETTER AND I POINTED OUT THAT IN US POLITICS IT IS NOT THAT DIFFICULT FOR A CONGRESSMAN TO OBTAIN SIGNATURES ON LIKE-MINDED COLLEAGUES ON SUCH A DOCUMENT. I POINTED OUT THAT ON THE OTHER HAND IT WOULD BE IDLE MERELY TO ATTRIBUTE THE LETTER AND ITS CONCERNS TO A RIGHT-WING, JOHN BIRCH MENTALITY. THERE DID EXIST CONCERN IN THE UNITED STATES OVER CERTAIN MEXICAN ATTITUDES BEING EXPRESSED BOTH IN MEXICO AND IN INTERNATIONAL FORUMS AND THAT WHILE THE LETTER, BY TAKING OUT OF THEIR DOMESTIC CONTEXT AND COMBINING A NUMBER OF ESSENTIALLY UNRELATED PHENOMENA, PRESENTED A DISTORTED PICTURE OF WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN MEXICO, IT WAS NOT ENTIRELY LACKING IN FACTUAL BASIS. ZAPATA AGREED.

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7. ZAPATA WAS CURIOUS THAT A GEORGIA CONGRESSMAN FROM A RURAL DISTRICT SHOULD HAVE SUCH INTEREST IN EVENTS IN MEXICO. HE KNEW JUST ENOUGH OF HIS BACKGROUND TO BE PUZZLED THAT A NON-BORDER STATE REPRESENTATIVE SHOULD BE ACQUAINTED, AT LEAST SUPERFICIALLY, WITH SO MUCH DETAIL OF THE MEXICAN SCENE. HE WONDERED IF SOME CONSERVATIVE MEXICAN ORGANIZATION, SUCH AS THE MONTERREY GROUP, WAS NOT BEHIND IT. IN ANY EVENT, THE PRESIDENT WANTED TO SEND HIM ON A MISSION TO THE STATES TO WORK OVER HIS OLD CONTACTS IN PRESS AND MEDIA AND ALSO TO MAKE SOME DIRECT CONTACT WITH MACDONALD; HE WANTED TO KNOW OF A POSSIBLE INTERMEDIARY WHO COULD ARRANGE SUCH AN APPOINTMENT. ZAPATA MADE CLEAR HE DID NOT WISH TO USE NORMAL CHANNELS, AND

INQUIRED ABOUT SEVERAL POSSIBLE WAYS OF GETTING IN TOUCH WITH MACDONALD, INCLUDING MY BROTHER, AN ATLANTA RESIDENT. I SUGGESTED EITHER THE MEXICAN CONSUL IN ATLANTA OR THE FORMER, HONORARY CONSUL, IF HE DID NOT WISH TO GO THROUGH THE MEXICAN EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON, BUT STRESSED AGAIN MY VIEW THAT THE BEST WAY TO GET THE INCIDENT BEHIND US WAS FOR THE GOM TO DOWNPLAY THE REACTION IN MEXICO. I SAID WE SHOULD TRY NOT TO OVERREACT OURSELVES, BUT AS IN FACT ON OTHER OCCASIONS WE WOULD TRY TO BE HELPFUL AND TO PUT THE MATTER IN PERSPECTIVE.

8. IN THE COURSE OF THE CONVERSATION, ZAPATA REITERATED A VIEW FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED BY HIM AND BY THE PRESIDENT--
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THAT NO ONE WAS MORE ANTI-COMMUNIST THAN ECHEVERRIA. HE POINTED OUT HOW HE HAD CRACKED DOWN ON EXTREMIST LABOR GROUPS, HOW THE GOM HAD MADE INROADS INTO TERRORIST GROUPS SUCH AS THE 23RD OF SEPTEMBER GROUP AND THE LUCIO CABANAS RURAL GUERRILLAS. FROM THERE HE WENT ON TO SAY HO THE MEXICAN SYSTEM, WHILE DOMINATED BY ONE PARTY, STILL HAD REPRESENTED WITHIN IT ALL THE POLITICAL VIEWS IN THE COUNTRY. WITHIN THE PARTY THERE EXISTED THE SAME GIVE AND TAKE, BALANCING OF INTERESTS AND COMPROMISE WHICH WAS "INSTITUTIONALIZED" IN THE UNITED STATES. IT WAS NOT INSTITUTIONALIZED IN MEXICO, BUT WAS A PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCE OF THE ONE DOMINANT BUT HETEROGENOUS PARTY. BECAUSE THE PRESIDENT HAD TO SPEAK FOR ALL VIEWS REPRESENTED WITHIN THE ONE PARTY, HE FREQUENTLY HAD TO MAKE VERY LEFTIST SOUNDING PRONOUNCEMENTS AND TO TAKE OCCASIONAL LEFTIST ACTIONS AND WE SHOULD UNDERSTAND AND BE TOLERANT OF THAT. IN THIS WAY MEXICO LET OFF STEAM WHICH UNDER OTHER SYSTEMS WOULD CREATE PRESSURES LEADING TO A RIGHT-WING COUP. I COMMENTED THAT THIS POINT OF VIEW HAD BEEN REPORTED TO WASHINGTON AD NAUSEAM BUT THAT I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DO SO AGAIN.

9. ZAPATA MAINTAINED THAT THE US SHOULD BE EVEN MORE CONCERNED LEST MEXICO FALL INTO A PATTERN OF RIGHTIST ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS AS THIS WOULD POLARIZE THE COUNTRY "INSTITUTIONALIZING ITS CONTRADICTIONS" AND MIGHT LEAD FIRST TO LEFTIST UNREST AND THEN INEVITABLY TO RIGHTIST/ MILITARY REPRESSION. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD THE TRADITIONAL MEXICAN "REVOLUTIONARY FAMILY" TURN OVER POWER TO THE NEWER LEFT. THE ESTABLISHMENT COULD NEITHER TEMPORIZE AND GOVERN THROUGH COMPROMISE AS UNDER ECHEVERRIA OR IT COULD MAINTAIN POWER THROUGH THE USE OF FORCE (AT WHICH MEXICANS WERE ALSO HISTORICALLY ADEPT). ZAPATA ASKED RHETORICALLY WHETHER IT WAS NOT MUCH MORE

IN THE US INTEREST TO HAVE THE PRESENT SYSTEM RATHER
THAN A PINOCHET-LIKE GOVERNMENT ON OUR SOUTHERN BORDER.

10. IN CONCLUSION, ZAPATA REPEATED AGAIN THE PRESIDENT'S
STRONG DESIRE TO AVOID DESTRUCTIVE POLEMICS AND HIS WISH
FOR CORDIAL RELATIONS GENERALLY AND AT THIS JUNCTURE
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IN PARTICULAR, I REPEATED OUR DESIRE AND LONG PATTERN OF
BEING DISCREET AND HELPFUL BUT SUGGESTED THAT OUR EFFORTS
WOULD BE AIDED BY A LOWERING OF THE TONE ON THE PART OF
LEAD AND HIS GOVERNMENT. ZAPATA AGREED.

11. COMMENT: THIS LATEST INCIDENT OF THE LETTER, WITH THE
DICHOTOMY BETWEEN THE PUBLIC (SEE MEXICO 10525) AND PRIVATE
MEXICAN REACTION, ILLUSTRATES THE MAXIM THAT MEXICO GENERALLY
WANTS TO BE DEFIANT TOWARDS US BUT NOT SO DEFIANT THAT THEY
ACTUALLY PROVOKE US TO ANGER.
NORMALLY THE INDIFFERENCE OF
THE US PRESS AND PUBLIC EVENTS SOUTH OF THE BORDER ENABLES
MEXICAN LEADERS TO KEEP SEPARATE THEIR DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN
AUDIENCES, BUT THE PRESIDENT'S HIGH PROFILE INTERNATIONALLY,
THE ZIONISM VOTE, PRISONERS, BRACEROS, ETC., APPEAR TO BE
FUSING TOGETHER HIS TWO AUDIENCES TO THE DETRIMENT OF
A HERETOFORE USEFUL(TO ECHEVERRIA) TACTIC. WHILE WE SHOULD BE
DISCREETLY HELPFUL AND CERTAINLY DO NOT WISH TO
ASSOCIATE OURSELVES WITH THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE CONGRESSIONAL
LETTER, NEITHER DOES IT BEHOOVE US TO
BE OVERLY ACCOMMODATING BY SPRINGING
TO ECHEVERRIA'S DEFENSE. EXTREME THOUGH THE LETTER IS, THE GOM IS
GETTING SOME UNVARNISHED FEEDBACK TO THEIR POLICIES AND RHETORIC
WHICH ALSO EXISTS IN MEXICO, BUT IS NOT PRINTED IN THE
SUBSERVIENT PRESS. WHILE WE ARE SENDING BY SEPARATE CABLE
SOME COMMENTARY ON THE LETTER, I WOULD BE INCLINED TO DO
NOTHING TO ENCOURAGE ANOTHER CONGRESSIONAL HEARING. IT
WAS JUST WHAT WAS NEEDED AND WAS ABLY
HANDLED THE FIRST TIME AROUND, BUT ON
THIS OCCASION WE MIGHT BE BETTER SERVED BY
LETTING THE MEXICANS DEFEND THEMSELVES.
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